

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks in a Discussion With Members of the Business Community in Grand Isle, Louisiana

June 4, 2010

The President. Everybody knows the mayor. The mayor's gathered up a group of local businesspeople. Butch, for example, owns a marina. Terry?

Terry Vegas. Shrimp boat.

The President. Shrimp boat. Floyd?

Floyd Lasseigne. Oyster fisherman.

The President. Oyster fisherman. And Patti has a convenience store; Chris is the owner of this—the bait shop.

And so we were just talking about the economic impact that this is having. And just to give you a sense of perspective, Terry's been shrimping out here for 46 years. His grandfather did it before him. And right now things are completely shut off for him.

Floyd, his—he leases the oyster beds from the State. The State now, obviously—and properly so—has said, you can't be pulling seafood out of these waters right now. He's got oil that's starting to seep in into these oil—oyster beds where he's got leases, and as a consequence, Floyd's trying to figure out how long this damage is going to last.

Mr. Lasseigne. I'm a fourth generation, and I got a son; that's a fifth generation. So, you know, sir, we've been—some of these leases been—[inaudible]—been in the family for 100 years.

The President. Butch was talking about the marina and making the point that these 3, 4 months are basically when all the business comes down. And normally, he—all his slips would be full right now—sounds like about only a third of them are full, and it may get worse from there.

Dudley A. "Butch" Gaspard, Jr. All our charter boat guys are hurting real bad too, because all the charter boat business is shut down. They make a living off of taking people out fishing.

The President. So right now, Butch isn't taking a salary so he can pay his employees, but he doesn't know how long that's going to last.

Then you got Patti, who owns a convenience store. Obviously, that store is dependent on these guys—the boats coming in, filling up with gas, buying ice, buying soft drinks. So she's down 85 percent on her business right now.

So this is just a sampling of what's happening out here. And part of what we talked about was what we can do to prevent oil from coming into these areas. Part of what we talked about is—in terms of the relief effort—can we deploy folks who've got boats here to help save their livelihoods right where they are, as opposed to having to go to other places. And so I'm going to ask Admiral Allen to make sure that he's looking at where people are being deployed, where vessels are being deployed, to make sure the people who know the waters best end up being hired there.

And the final thing is, we've got to talk about—what we talked about up in New Orleans—which is, are we making sure that claims are being processed effectively. And right now, after that initial \$5,000 check that BP wrote, the claim center's been taking in claims, but it sounds—based on what I'm hearing—that there's a lot of process, but not much actual action, and so we're going to see if we can do something better on that.

But the main point I think I want to make—and, Mayor, feel free to chime in on this—is these are communities that have had a way of life for generations, and what people are concerned about right now is not just the damage done in the short term—because these are some tough folks. They've been through hurricanes and—Butch and Terry——

Participant. Low prices.

The President. Low prices——

Participant. High cost of fuel.

The President. Terry was talking about how, if the walls stay up on a building around here, a hurricane comes, you wash out the mud, and a week later, everybody's back in business. So these are folks who are used to hardship and know how to deal with it. But what they're concerned about right now is, is this going to have a lasting impact that they can't recover from? And that's why Thad and the rest of the Federal team is so committed to making sure that everything that can be done will be done.

This is going to be bad no matter what we do. But we can hopefully minimize the damage, but it requires good coordination between the State, Federal, and local, and it requires BP to make sure that, as I said up in New Orleans, folks aren't getting nickled-and-dimed, and that we're doing what we need to do early to prevent the worst-case scenario from happening later.

So, Mr. Mayor, anything you want to add?

Mayor David Camardelle. Well, again, the main concern is to block these five passes that we talked about. The barges are available, Admiral, right here and all along the coast, from Venice to Harvey Canal, all the way back to Homer. They're standing by, and hopefully, we can get the President to get on BP—between both of you guys—so we can put some barges there temporary to block these passes so we can save our neighboring parish, Lafourche Parish, St. Charles Parish, Orleans Parish, Jefferson Parish, Plaquemines Parish. And just—and Jefferson Parish, where we live at—if we can block them five passes right now, these fishermen can tell you, okay, we can save—continue to saving the rest of the 2 million acres of oyster leases.

We have \$2 billion worth of seafood that comes out behind me, right in this estuary—\$2 billion worth. We have a billion dollars of recreational license, recreational fishing that generates to the marinas, to all the stores, all the way across Louisiana. But these guys, this woman here with the convenience store, if we lose the estuaries in the back, we're history. And they'll tell you that.

We're born and raised—our grandfathers, grandmothers—we made a living right here behind us. There's no reason why this shrimp boat should be tied up. It ought to have skimmers on it to make sure that we can block the oil until we put these booms. And I'm asking you to——

The President. We're going to work.

Mayor Camardelle. ——push BP to do it.

The President. Now, the—last week, when I was talking to the mayor, he started choking up just talking about the fact that out of his own pocket, he was having to provide some help and some loans to his buddies, to fishermen, folks in the area. That's what we should be able to prevent. There's oil washing in, but people can help each other. And the company that's responsible can make sure that it's responding quickly and effectively.

And when the mayor told me that story, it was, I think, an example of what's happening all across this Gulf Coast. And it's going to be multiplied not just in Louisiana, but in Alabama, in Mississippi, in Florida. There are small communities like this all across the Gulf, and they've got to make sure that their voice is being heard day in, day out.

And I know that they've got a fierce advocate in Thad Allen. But I wanted you to know that behind Thad Allen stands the President of the United States.

Mayor Camardelle. Yes, sir.

The President. All right?

Mayor Camardelle. And like I said, since the last time you've been here, the Coast Guard is unbelievable. Admiral, I want you to know that. You guys are really working 24 hours for us. And you did push BP. And like I said, I'm very emotional because I'm still giving—I'm not going to cut their water off, I'm not going to cut their electricity off, and I'm not going to cut their gas off. I have one of the businesses right now that has a \$5,200 electricity bill, and I'm calling energy to make sure not to cut them off.

When these businesspeople come up to you and say, "It's time to help," it's not easy. And I—Patti can tell you, I—the night before last, I told her that, "I'm going to keep you strong. I'm going to try to bring you more business." Butch calls me: "David, we need more boats. Get some more vessel of opportunities." He's fighting to save his oysters. I'm trying to keep Grand Isle alive, to try to get tours. I opened the beach Memorial Sunday at 3 o'clock—the people were calling me—so the marinas can sell a towel so these young kids can lay on the beach.

And then, watching the oil coming across the shore, and it's—they—some people think I'm better than God, you know? That's how serious this is. They'll tell you, "I live right down the street. I've been averaging 2 hours of sleep, just worrying in—and looking at the ceiling fan and wondering what's going to happen tomorrow and praying to God that no more oil comes on the beach."

So like Terry said earlier, his wife is sick. I bring seven people a day to—[inaudible]—in New Orleans in a van to cross that long bridge you crossed, and putting gas in the truck to make sure that we can keep the help. And we help each other. And we don't have no money, it don't matter. We help each other. That's what we do.

The President. Well, that's supposed to be what the entire United States does—

Mayor Camardelle. Exactly.

The President. —is helping each other.

Mr. Vegas. We're not bitter at the oil companies for what's happening. We're just bitter at those that cut the corners and cause the havoc that we're having right now.

Participant. It's not getting cleaned up fast enough.

Participant. We thrive on the oil companies down here, and we enjoy the business.

Mayor Camardelle. We support them.

The President. Well, I think the point with the oil companies is they've got to support you the same way you support them. And they've got to make sure that—because there are a lot of folks in the oil business who do the right thing and who aren't cutting corners. We've just got to make sure that we find out what happened and that those who are responsible are held responsible, that we fix whatever's wrong. We're still going to need the oil production, but we've got to make sure that we do it in the right way, because we just can't have a situation like this happen again.

Participant. Can't have that happen all the time, no.

Participant. Have to follow the rules.

Participant. Just tell the truth.

Participant. That's right.

Participant. From day one, they lied to us—BP. They said, 1,000 barrels a day. Come to find out, they say, it's 2,000—put the tube in there, it was 5,000. Oh, it's 5,000? Now it's, what, 12,000 to 19,000 barrels a day? Just tell the people the truth, you know? That's all we want.

Mayor Camardelle. Like I said, the biggest shrimp dock in America is right here in Grand Isle; it's Blanche's Seafood. And he's completely shut down. They'll tell you, the boats are tied up. How many boats he has right now, about 100? Close to 100 boats just tied up. And you've got the Vietnamese families, you've got the true Cajun people here, and they're just sitting on the deck of the boat and just waiting on the vessel of opportunity.

And I want to respect the Admiral and BP, where, you know, they're trying. It's just since you left, they've made a big change. Since you came to me, you made a big change, and we support you for that. But we're just worried. You hear us here: we're worried. And we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. And that's why we depend on you—both of you guys—to make sure that—and you heard them today. We don't want to be on food stamps—none of my people—we want to just untie the boat, be able to see your two daughters right here and kiss them in the evening and daddy's going to work.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 5 p.m. at Camardelle's Seafood. In his remarks, he referred to Adm. Thad W. Allen, USCG, in his capacity as national incident commander for the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. Participating in the discussion were Dudley A. "Butch" Gaspard, Jr., coowner, Sand Dollar Marina and Sand Dollar Motel; Terry Vegas, shrimper; Floyd Lasseigne, oyster fisherman; Patti W. Rigaud, owner, A Better Buy Shell; and Chris J. Camardelle, owner, Camardelle's Seafood. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Business community in Grand Isle, LA, discussion.

Locations: Grand Isle, LA.

Names: Allen, Thad W.; Camardelle, Chris J.; Camardelle, David; Gaspard, Dudley A. "Butch," Jr.; Lasseigne, Floyd; Rigaud, Patti W.; Vegas, Terry.

Subjects: Energy : British Petroleum; Energy : Offshore oil and gas drilling; Environment : Oil spills :: Corporate responsibility; Gulf of Mexico : Deepwater Horizon oil spill :: Economic effects and recovery efforts; Gulf of Mexico : Deepwater Horizon oil spill :: Environmental effects and cleanup efforts; Louisiana : Oil spill, damage and recovery efforts; Louisiana : President's visits.

DCPD Number: DCPD201000458.